CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES.

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EDITED BY

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Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.—JUDE.

ESSAY ON THE PROSPECTS OF IMMORTALITY.

No. III.

HAVING now noticed the capacity of man for the enjoyment of happiness by anticipation, I design at present, to advance something in favor of the hope of immortality, and of revelation in general, by showing, that revelation and and the hope of immortality are necessary to the moral, and mental improvement of our species: and as I have just been reading in the works of a distinguished writer, some appropriate remarks on this topic, I will copy them, for the benefit of my readers.

"It is acknowledged," says this writer, "that man is superior to the brute creatures, and that this superiority consists in being much happier in himself, and in his power of contributing in a more eminent degree, to the happiness of others; by which means he makes nearer approaches to his Maker, who is supremely benevolent, and superlatively happy.

"It is also well known, that this superiority in man, with respect to his power of enjoying and communicating happiness, depends upon the superiority of his mental faculties, by which he is capable of greater comprehension of mind, of taking into his view more of the past, and of the future, along with the present; so that his ideas are more complex, and farther removed from mere sensible objects.

In consequence of this, the happiness of man does not depend upon his present sensations, but is of a more stable nature; and his resolutions and actions do not depend upon variable circumstances, but he can pursue a uniform plan of conduct, without being diverted from it by the events of the hour or day.

"This superior comprehension of mind, cannot, however, in the nature of things, be attained by man without a state of progressive improvement. We all begin our career of intellectual life with mere selfishness, attending to impressions made upon us by means of the external senses; for we have no other inlets of ideas or knowledge. Of course we are for sometime occupied about ourselves, and do not look beyond ourselves, but in consequence of experience, aided by reflection, which joins distant objects to those which are present. By impressions made on our senses, when we are children, we are impelled to action; and these impressions are the elements of all our knowledge, and all our powers in future life."

We all begin our intellectual career, with a very small stock of ideas. This stock however, is capable of being increased, by reflection and experience, to an astonishing extent. "Thus," says another writer, "has man travelled through the abstruse regions of the philosophic world, and has originated rules by which he can direct the ship through the pathless ocean, and measure the comet's flight over the fields of unlimited space. He has established society and government. He can aggregate the profusion of every climate and season. He can meliorate the severity, and remedy the imperfections of nature herself. Aided by these he can perform all the wonders of sculpture and painting. He can almost make the marble speak. He can almost make the brook murmur down the painted landscape. Often on the pinions of imagination, he soars aloft where the eye has never travelled; where other stars glitter on the mantle of night, and a more effulgent sun lights up the blushes of morning. Flying from world to world, he gazes on all the glories of creation; or lighting on the distant margin of the universe, darts the eye of fancy over the mighty void, where power creative never yet was energized; where existence still sleeps in the wide abyss of

possibility." As "great oaks, from little acorns grow," so may man by reflection and experience, rise from a state of infantile ignorance, to the gigantic stature of Locke, Newton, Bacon, Jefferson, or others, who from inconscious babes, grew up to all their merited glory, of intellectual elevation.

It must not be forgotten however, that we are dependent in every case, on surrounding circumstances, for the means of mental improvement. As our senses are the inlets of our knowledge, so the objects which present themselves to those senses, are the causes of all our mental impressions, so that mental improvement is nothing more than an acquaintance with the qualities of all those objects which in any way present themselves to our minds, and consequently, mental improvement, must be in every instance commensurate with our right apprehension of all those objects, of what kind soever they may be, which impress our minds through the medium of our senses.

Now, these things being granted, (and we know they must be granted,) and it follows of necessity, that an intelligent Christian, who avails himself of all those means of information which present themselves to men in the best circumstances, will be just as far removed by mental and moral improvement above the mere infidel philosopher, as the philosopher, is removed above the brutes. We say "*intelligent Christians*," in contradistinction to all those professors of christianity, who make christianity to consist in *dreams*, and *impulses*, and mere *feeling*, and who *lounge* their days away, in *ignorance*, *superstition* and *meanness*, never giving themselves the trouble to acquaint themselves with those *essential matters of fact*, on which the Christian religion is predicated. But this by the way.

In order to test the above position, let us suppose the mind of Newton limited by his philosophical experiments. Let us in fact suppose him to be an infidel. And let us again suppose another individual having all the philosophical attainments of Newton, and in addition to those attainments, let us suppose him to be an *intelligent Christian*. The question now is, would not the mind of the Christian philosopher, be impressed with objects as much more sublime than those to which the mind of the

infidel philosopher would be limited, as eternity is of greater duration than time, or as immortality is an object superlatively more glorious than the sun, moon and stars? and would not the christian philosopher, have in his possession a much larger stock of materials, for the sublimating, refining, and elevating of his own mind, than he could possibly obtain from the whole encyclopedia of natural arts and sciences?

If then, moral and mental improvement, to the utmost extent of which we are capable, be our object, we must become Christians. "For" (to return to our first author,) "the belief of a God, and a providence, contribute to make a man a much greater, and happier being, than he otherwise could be. It enlarges his view of the system of nature, of which he is a part. It discovers to him his connexion with, and his interest in, other beings, and other things. It leads him to look back to the origin of things, and forward to the termination of the great drama, and to believe that it will be most glorious and happy.

This end will be much farther promoted by the great doctrine of revelation, that this life is not the whole of our existence, that it is only a state of probation and discipline, calculated to train us up for a future, and more glorious state after death. How different, and how superior a being must this view rightly impressed on the mind, make a man. It is a difference not easy to be described. A being of a day will have his views, thoughts, and schemes adapted to a day. To-morrow cannot interest him, because he has no interest in it. If he like the scenes of the day, to which his existence is confined, his heart must sicken at the idea of any thing beyond it, because he is totally excluded from it.

What then must be the condition of the man who truly and habitually believes, that he is born for eternity; that years and ages bear no sensible proportion to the term of his existence; that the duration of the sun, moon, and stars, is no more than a period that divides his existence, and assists him in measuring it; that when they shall be no more, he only, as it were, begins to be, and that other suns and other worlds will be equally short lived with respect to him. How sublime and how animating is the

thought! Can any thing mean and sordid occupy the breast of a being who is persuaded of this grand destination? Will he not overlook every thing temporary, and be ever stretching his thoughts to things eternal, in which his interest is infinitely greater than in any thing here?

We think highly, and justly so, of the advantage which an acquaintance with history gives a man over one who has no knowledge of any events besides those of his own times. We are highly gratified in being made acquainted with the origin and early history of the country in which we were born, and of the nation to which we belong. We are sensible that travelling and seeing other countries, and other customs than our own, improve and enlarge the mind. They add to our stock of ideas and give us a greater field for contemplation. They are thereby the means of removing local prejudices, and of lessening the influence of all ideas connected with that of self.

What, then, must it be to be enabled by the help of revelation, to look so far back as to the origin of the world, to range through all the successive dispensations of God to man, to contemplate more especially the promulgation of the gospel, and to look forward to that glorious state of things which is to take place in consequence of its universal spread; to look farther still to the resurrection of the dead, and the day of final judgment, followed by a never ending eternity?

What a fund of great thoughts, do these great subjects supply, and how scanty must be the furniture of that man's mind, let him be a philosopher, a historian, a statesman, or whatever else the world can make him, or he can make himself, compared to that of the meanest Christian, to whom these great and extensive views, and things are familiar?

The contemplation of such objects as these, is sufficient to raise a man above the world, and all the little pursuits and gratifications of it. Will such a man as this bestow much thought on the indulgence of his appetites and passions? Will he envy any man the enjoyment of any thing that this world can give him? or will he have a wish to aggrandize himself or his family, in it?

He will on the contrary, be rather apt to despise it too much, so as to attend too little to his duty in it, so engrossed will his mind be with things of infinitely greater magnitude and importance. This would unavoidably be the case, were it not that things *temporal*, though of little moment in themselves, have the advantage of being present; whereas things *eternal*, though infinitely momentous, are distant. But, my brethren, faith can bring them near, and give them an influence as if they were present. "*Faith*," as the apostle says, "*is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*"

If these be the true sources of that comprehension of mind which gives one man a superiority over another; if, as is commonly, and justly, said, it be *great thoughts* that make *great minds*, little cause has the poor Christian to envy even the most enlightened, and still less scholars who are not Christians. The study of the scriptures alone contributes so much to this great end, that all that learning can do more, is a mere trifle, and without it infinitely little. The best informed unbeliever has but a scanty furniture of mind, few elements, as we say, of greatness, dignity and happiness, compared with the most unlearned Christian; and with respect to proper intellectual improvement, ought to rank far below him. He has comparatively, though more in number, yet much smaller objects to contemplate; and what is of more consequence, he is much more in danger of giving into low pursuits and gratifications, which debase the nature of man, and render him of little value in society.

All the greater virtues, such as patience in suffering, forgiveness of injuries, general benevolence, and habitual devotion, imply great comprehension of mind, or a union of more ideas and impressions than the present moment would furnish; but with them the mind of a Christian is already furnished, and therefore those sublime virtues are easily acquired by a Christian, and not easily, if at all, by those who are not Christians.

With respect to patience and forbearance, they are virtues which can only rise out of reflection; for the pressure of pain, and evils of any kind, naturally make men impa-

tient, wishing, and endeavoring to procure immediate relief. It is thinking, and taking distant views of things, that make men patient, and we are best enabled to bear present evils by means of a firm belief in the justice and goodness of that Being, whose creatures we are. But a person who never looks to this *first cause*, will naturally indulge in fretfulness, impatience, and resentment against *second causes*, the immediate occasion of his sufferings.

The greatest of all virtues, and the immediate parent of several others, *habitual devotion* naturally arises from considering the Supreme Being as our proper parent, benefactor, moral governor and final judge. This faith will inspire the mind with the greatest reverence for God, with respect for his authority, and entire confidence in the dispensations of Providence. With this faith we shall live as constantly *seeing* and having intercourse with *Him that is invisible;* and a more elevated, dignified and happy state of mind cannot be conceived.

But the man who either believes that there is no God, or who lives without him in the world, wholly thoughtless of his being, his perfections, and providence, cannot attain to this elevation. His views are bounded by the creature, and he never looks up to the Creator. If he have any remains of pious impressions, the idea of a God will even give him pain and displeasure. He will profane his name with oaths and execrations, and make a mock of things the most sacred; a sure mark of a low, as well as a depraved mind.

With the rejection of Christianity, an attentive observer will always find the loss, or diminution of these more sublime virtues. For they necessarily depend on a regard to providence, and a future state; and it is generally attended with an evident debasement of character, by sinking into low vices, debauchery and profaneness; or if external virtue be preserved from habit, and some of the greater kinds as generosity, and public spirit, be cherished, it is upon such principles as cannot be depended on, viz. an enlightened selfishness, and a regard to posthumous fame; and these will operate more on great occasions, than in the uniform tenor of peaceful life.

To the sublime comforts of religion, which are most wanted in the evening of life, unbelievers must necessarily be strangers. And if there be a happy season for man in this life, it is that which is enjoyed towards the close of it; when the labors of life are nearly over, when the dangers of virtue are past, and a calm retrospect can be taken of the course of divine providence respecting ourselves, our dearest interests, and the world, from an unshaken faith in a righteous and benevolent Governor of the universe; and when a joyful prospect of immortality can be indulged without alloy. In this state of mind, the prospect of death itself is pleasing. Having seen and enjoyed enough of this life, a good man looks forward with pleasing expectation towards another, singing the Christians triumphant song, *O Death! where is thy sting? O Grave! where is thy victory?*

Internal marks of truth, and honesty, to be found in the New Testament.

BY THOMAS CHALMERS.

[Continued from page 59.]

There was nothing in the situation of the New Testament writers, which leads us to perceive that they had any possible inducement for publishing a falsehood.

We have not to allege the mere testimony of the Christian writers, for the danger to which the profession of Christianity exposed all its adherents at that period. We have the testimony of Tacitus to this effect. We have innumerable allusions, or express intimations of the same circumstance in the Roman historians. The treatment and persecution of the Christians makes a principal figure in the affairs of the empire; and there is no point better established in ancient history, than that the bare circumstance of being a Christian, brought many to the punishment of death, and exposed all to the danger of a suffering, the most appaling and repulsive to the feelings of our nature.

It is not difficult to perceive why the Roman government, in its treatment of Christians, departed from its usual

principles of toleration. We know it to have been their uniform practice, to allow every indulgence to the religious belief of those different countries in which they established themselves. The truth is, that such an indulgence demanded of them no exertion of moderation or principle. It was quite consonant to the spirit of Paganism. A different country worshipped different gods, but it was a general principle of Paganism, that each country had its gods, to which the inhabitants of that country owed their peculiar homage and veneration. In this way there was no interference betwixt the different religions which prevailed in the world. It fell in with the policy of the Roman government to allow the fullest toleration to other religions, and it demanded no sacrifice of principle. It was even a dictate of principle with them to respect the gods of other countries, and the violation of a religion different from their own seems to have been felt, not merely as a departure from policy or justice, but to be viewed with the same sentiment of horror, which is annexed to blasphemy or sacrilege. So long as we are under Paganism, the truth of one religion does not involve in it the falsehood or the rejection of another. In respecting the religion of another country, we did not abandon our own; nor did it follow, that the inhabitants of that other country annexed any contempt or discredit to the religion in which we had been educated. In this mutual reverence for the religion of each other, no principle was departed from, and no object of veneration abandoned. It did not involve in it the denial or relinquishment of their own gods, but only the addition of so many more gods to their catalogue.

In this respect, however, the Jews stood distinguished from every other people within the limits of the Roman empire. Their religious belief carried in it something more than attachment to their own system. It carried in it the contempt and detestation of every other. Yet, in spite of this circumstance, their religion was protected by the mild and equitable toleration of the Roman government. The truth is, that there was nothing in the habits or character of the Jews, which was calculated to give much disturbance to the establishments of other countries. Though they admitted converts from other nations, yet their spirit of

proselytism was far from being of that active or adventurous kind, which could alarm the Roman government for the safety of any existing institutions. Their high and exclusive veneration for their own system, gave an universal disdain to the Jewish character, which was not at all inviting to foreigners; but still, as it led to nothing mischievous in point of effect, it seems to have been overlooked by the Roman government, as a piece of impotent vanity.

But the case was widely different with the Christian system. It did not confine itself to the denial or rejection of every other system. It was for imposing its own exclusive authority over the consciences of all, and for detaching as many as it could from their allegiance to the religion of their own country. It carried on its forehead all the offensive characters of a monopoly, and not merely excited resentment by the supposed arrogance of its pretensions, but from the rapidity and extent of its innovations, spread an alarm over the whole Roman empire for the security of all its establishments. Accordingly, at the commencement of its progress, so long as it was confined to Judea, and the immediate neighborhood, it seems to have been in perfect safety from the persecutions of the Roman government. It was at first looked upon as a mere modification of Judaism, and that the first Christians differed from the rest of their countrymen, only *in certain questions of their own superstition*. For a few years after the crucifixion of our Saviour, it seems to have excited no alarm on the part of the Roman emperors, who did not depart from their usual maxims of toleration, till they began to understand the magnitude of its pretensions, and the unlooked for success which attended them.

In the course of a very few years, after its first promulgation, it drew down upon it the hostility of the Roman government; and the fact is undoubted, that some of its first teachers, who annnounced themselves to be the companions of our Saviour, and the eye-witnesses of all the remarkable events in his history, suffered martyrdom for their adherence to the religion which they taught.

The disposition of the Jews to the religion of Jesus was no less hostile; and it manifested itself at a still earlier stage of the business. The causes of this bostility are

obvious to all, who are in the slightest degree conversant with the history of those times. It is true that the Jews did not at all times possess the power of life and death, nor was it competent for them to bring the Christians to execution by the exercise of legal authority. Still, however, their powers of mischief were considerable. Their wishes had always a certain control over the measures of the Roman governor; and we know that it was this control which was the means of extorting from Pilate the unrighteous sentence, by which the very first teacher of our religion was brought to a cruel and ignominious death. We also know, that under Herod Agrippa, the power of life and death was vested in a Jewish sovereign, and that this power was actually exerted against the most distinguished Christians of the time. Add to this, that the Jews had, at all times, the power of inflicting the lesser punishments. They could whip, they could imprison. Besides all this, the Christians had to brave the frenzy of an enraged multitude; and some of them actually suffered martyrdom in the violence of the popular commotions.

Nothing is more evident than the utter disgrace which was annexed by the world at large to the profession of Christianity at that period. Tacitus calls it "*superstitio exitiabilis*," and accuses the Christians of enmity to mankind. By Epictetus and others, their heroism is termed obstinacy, and it was generally treated by the Roman governors as the infatuation of a miserable and despised people. There was none of that glory annexed to it which blazes around the martyrdom of a patriot or a philosopher. That constancy, which, in another cause, would have made them illustrious, was held to be a contemptible folly, which only exposed them to the derision and insolence of the multitude. A name and a reputation in the world might sustain the dying moments of Socrates or Regulus, but what earthly principles can account for the intrepidity of those poor and miserable outcasts, who consigned themselves to a voluntary martyrdom in the cause of their religion?

Having premised these observations, we offer the following alternative to the mind of every candid inquirer. The first Christians either delivered a sincere testimony or they

imposed a story upon the world which they knew to be a fabrication.

The persecutions to which the first Christians voluntarily exposed themselves, compel us to adopt the first part of the alternative. It is not to be conceived, that a man would resign fortune, and character, and life, in the assertion of what he knew to be a falsehood. The first Christians must have believed their story to be true; and it only remains to prove, that if they believed it to be true, it must be true indeed.

A voluntary martyrdom must be looked upon as the highest possible evidence which it is in the power of man to give of his sincerity. The martyrdom of Socrates has never been questioned, as an undeniable proof of the sincere devotion of his mind to the principles of that philosophy for which he suffered. The death of Arch-bishop Cranmer will be allowed by all, to be a decisive evidence of his sincere rejection of what he conceived to be the errors of Popery, and his thorough conviction in the truth of the opposite system. When the council of Geneva burnt Servetus, no one will question the sincerity of the latter's belief, however much he may question the truth of it. Now, in all these cases, the proof goes no further, than to establish the sincerity of the martyr's belief. It goes but a little way, indeed, in establishing the justness of it. This is a different question. A man may be mistaken, though he is sincere. His errors, if they are not seen to be such, will exercise all the influence and authority of truth over him. Martyrs have bled on opposite sides of the question. It is impossible, then, to rest on this circumstance as an argument for the truth of either system, but the argument is always deemed incontrovertible, in as far as it goes to establish the sincerity of each of the parties, and that both died in the firm conviction of the doctrines which they professed.

Now the martyrdom of the first Christians stands distinguished from all other examples, by this circumstance, that it not merely proves the sincerity of the martyr's belief; but it also proves, that what he believed was true. In other cases of martyrdom, the sufferer, when he lays down his life, gives testimony to the truth of an opinion. In the

case of the Christians, when they laid down their lives, they gave their testimony to the truth of a fact, of which they affirmed themselves to be the eye and the ear witnesses.—The sincerity of both testimonies is unquestionable; but it is only in the latter case, that the truth of the testimony follows as a necessary consequence of its sincerity. An opinion comes under the cognizance of the understanding, ever liable, as we all know, to error and delusion. A fact comes under the cognizance of the senses, which has ever been esteemed as infallible, when they give their testimony to such plain, and obvious, and palpable appearances, as those which make up the evangelical story. We are still at liberty to question the philosophy of Socrates, or the orthodoxy of Cranmer and Servetus; but if we were told by a Christian teacher, in the solemnity of his dying hour, and with the dreadful apparatus of martyrdom before him, that he saw Jesus after he had risen from the dead; that he conversed with him many days; that he put his hand into the print of his sides; and, in the ardour of his joyful conviction, exclaimed, "My Lord, and my God!" we should feel that there was no truth in the world, if this language and this testimony could deceive us.

If Christianity be not true, then the first Christians must have been mistaken as to the subject of their testimony.—This supposition is destroyed by the nature of the subject. It was not testimony to a doctrine, which might deceive the understanding. It was something more than testimony to a dream, or a trance, or a midnight fancy, which might deceive the imagination. It was testimony to a multitude, and a succession of palpable facts, which could never have deceived the senses, and which preclude all possibility of mistake, even though it had been the testimony only of one individual. But when in addition to this we consider, that it is testimony, not of one, but of many individuals; that it is a story repeated in a variety of forms, but substantially the same; that it is the concurring testimony of different eye-witnesses, or the companions of eye-witnesses—we may, after this, take refuge in the idea of falsehood and collusion, but it is not to be admitted, that those eight different writers of the New Testament, could have all blundered the matter with such method, and such uniformity.

We know that, in spite of the magnitude of their sufferings, there are infidels who, driven from the second part of the alternative, have recurred to the first, and have affirmed, that the glory of establishing a new religion, induced the first Christians to assert, and to persist in asserting, what they knew to be a falsehood. But they forget, that we have the concurrence of two parties to the truth of Christianity, and that it is the conduct only of one of the parties, which can be accounted for by the supposition in question. The two parties are the teachers and the taught. The former may aspire to the glory of founding a new faith; but what glory did the latter propose to themselves from being the dupes of an imposition so ruinous to every earthly interest, and held in such low and disgraceful estimation by the world at large? Abandon the teachers of Christianity to every imputation, which infidelity, on the rack for conjectures to give plausibility to its system, can desire; how shall we explain the concurrence of its disciples? There may be glory in leading, but we see no glory in being led. If Christianity were false, and Paul had the effrontery to appeal to his 500 living witnesses, whom he alleges to have seen Christ after his resurrection; the submissive acquiescence of his disciples remains a very inexplicable circumstance. The same Paul, in his epistles to the Corinthians, tells them that some of them had the gift of healing, and the power of working miracles; and that the sign of an apostle had been wrought among them in wonders and mighty deeds. A man aspiring to the glory of an accredited teacher, would never have committed himself on a subject, where his falsehood could have been so readily exposed. And in the veneration with which we know his epistles to have been preserved by the church of Corinth, we have not merely the testimony of their writer to the truth of the Christian miracles, but the testimony of a whole people who had no interest in being deceived.

Had Christianity been false, the reputation of its first teachers lay at the mercy of every individual among the numerous proselytes which they had gained to their system. It may not be competent for an unlettered peasant to detect the absurdity of a doctrine; but he can at all times lift his testimony against a fact, said to have happened in his

presence, and under the observation of his senses. Now it happens, that in a number of the epistles, there are allusions or express intimations of the miracles that had been wrought in the different churches to which these epistles are addressed. How comes it, if it be all a fabrication, that it was never exposed? We know that some of the disciples were driven by the terrors of persecuting violence to resign their profession. How should it happen, that none of them ever attempted to vindicate their apostacy, by laying open the artifice and insincerity of their Christian teachers? We may be sure that such a testimony would have been highly acceptable to the existing authorities of that period. The Jews would have made the most of it; and the vigilant and discerning officers of the Roman government would not have failed to turn it to account. The mystery would have been exposed and laid open, and the curiosity of latter ages would have been satisfied as to the wonderful and unaccountable steps, by which a religion could make such head in the world, though it rested its whole authority on facts; the falsehood of which was accessible to all who were at the trouble to enquire about them. But no! We hear of no such testimony from the apostates of that period. We read of some, who, agonised at the reflection of their treachery, returned to their first profession, and expiated, by martyrdom, the guilt which they felt they had incurred by their dereliction of the truth. This furnishes a strong example of the power of conviction, and when we join with it, that it is conviction in the integrity of those teachers, who appealed to miracles which had been wrought among them, it appears to us a testimony in favour of our religion which is altogether irresistible.

ON THE RESURRECTION.

BISHOP WATSON'S ANSWER TO PAINE.

[*Concluded from page* 72.]

You seem to think this a great difficulty, and incapable of solution; for you say, "It is not possible, unless we allow these disciples the right of wilful lying, that the writers of

these books could be any of the eleven persons called disciples; for if, according to Matthew, the eleven went into Galilee to meet Jesus in a mountain, by his own appointment, on the same day that he is said to have risen, Luke and John must have been two of that eleven; yet the writer of Luke says expressly, and John implies as much, that the meeting was that same day in a house at Jerusalem; and on the other hand, if, according to Luke and John the *eleven* were assembled in a house at Jerusalem, Matthew must have been one of that eleven; yet Matthew says, the meeting was in the mountain in Galilee, and consequently the evidence given in those books destroy each other." When I was a young man in the university, I was pretty much accustomed to drawing of consequences; but my *Alma Mater* did not suffer me to draw consequences after your manner; she taught me—that a false position must end in an absurd conclusion. I have shown your position—that the eleven went into Galilee on the day of the resurrection—to be false, and hence your conclusion—that the evidence given in these two books destroy each other—is not to be admitted. You ought, moreover, to have considered, that the feast of unleavened bread, which immediately followed the day on which the passover was eaten, lasted seven days; and strict observers of the law did not think themselves at liberty to leave Jerusalem till that feast was ended; and this is a collateral proof that the disciples did not go to Galilee on the day of the resurrection.

You certainly have read the New Testament, but not, I think, with great attention, or you would have known who the apostles were. In this place you reckon *Luke* as one of the eleven, and in other places you speak of him as an eye-witness of the things he relates; you ought to have known that Luke was no apostle; and he tells you himself, in the preface to his gospel, that he wrote from the testimony of others. If this mistake proceeds from your ignorance, you are not a fit person to write comments on the Bible; if from design, (which I am unwilling to suspect) you are still less fit: in either case it may suggest to your readers the propriety of suspecting the truth and accuracy of your assertions, however daring and intemperate. "Of the numerous priests or parsons of the present day, bishops

and all, the sum total of whose learning," according to you, "is a b ab, and hic, hæc, hoc, there is not one amongst them," you say, "who can write poetry like Homer, or science like Euclid." If I should admit this, (though there are many of them, I doubt not, who understand these authors better than you do,) yet I cannot admit that there is one among them, bishops and all, so ignorant as to rank Luke the evangelist among the apostles of Christ. I will not press this point; any man may fall into a mistake, and the consciousness of this fallibility should create in all men a little modesty, a little diffidence, a little caution, before they do presume to call the most illustrious characters of antiquity, liars, fools and knaves.

You want to know why Jesus did not shew himself to all the people after his resurrection. This is one of Spinoza's objections; and it may sound well enough in the mouth of a Jew, wishing to excuse the infidelity of his countrymen; but it is not judiciously adopted by deists of other nations. God gives us the means of health, but he does not force us to the use of them; he gives us the powers of the mind, but he does not compel us to the cultivation of them: he gave the Jews opportunities of seeing the miracles of Jesus, but he did not oblige them to believe them. They who persevered in their incredulity after the resurrection of Lazarus, would have persevered also after the resurrection of Jesus. Lazarus had been buried four days, Jesus but three; the body of Lazarus had begun to undergo corruption, the body of Jesus saw no corruption; why should you expect, that they would have believed in Jesus on his own resurrection, when they had not believed in him on the resurrection of Lazarus? When the Pharisees were told of the resurrection of Lazarus, they, together with the chief priests, gathered a council and said—"What do we? for this man doth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him:—then from that day forth they took council together to put him to death." The great men at Jerusalem, you see admitted that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead; yet the belief of that miracle did not generate conviction that Jesus was the Christ, it only exasperated their malice, and accelerated their purpose of destroying him. Had Jesus shewn himself after his resurrection, the

chief priests would probably have gathered another council, and have opened it with, What do we? and ended it with a determination to put him to death. As to us, the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus which we have in the New Testament, is far more convincing, than if it had been related that he shewed himself to every man in Jerusalem; for then we should have had a suspicion, that the whole story had been fabricated by the Jews.

You think Paul an improper witness of the resurrection; I think him one of the fittest that could have been chosen; and for this reason—his testimony is the testimony of a former enemy. He had, in his own miraculous conversion, sufficient ground for changing his opinion as to matter of fact; for believing that to be a fact, which he had formerly, through extreme prejudice, considered as a fable. For the truth of the resurrection of Jesus he appeals to above two hundred and fifty living witnesses; and before whom does he make this appeal?—Before his enemies, who were able and willing to blast his character if he had advanced an untruth. You know, undoubtedly, that Paul had resided at Corinth near two years; that during a part of that time, he had testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ; that, finding the bulk of that nation obstinate in their unbelief, he had turned to the Gentiles, and had converted many to the faith in Christ; that he left Corinth, and went to preach the gospel in other parts; that about three years after he had quitted Corinth, he wrote a letter to the converts which he had made in that place, and who after his departure had been split into different factions, and had adopted different teachers in opposition to Paul. From this account we may be certain, that Paul's letter, and every circumstance in it, would be minutely examined. The city of Corinth was full of Jews; these men were, in general, Paul's bitter enemies; yet in the face of them all, he asserts, "that Jesus Christ was buried; that he rose again the third day; that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve; that he was afterwards seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part were then alive. An appeal to above two hundred and fifty living witnesses, is a pretty strong proof of a fact; but it becomes irresistible, when that appeal is submitted to the judgment of enemies. St. Paul, you must

allow, was a man of ability; but he would have been an idiot, had he put it in the power of his enemies to prove, from his own letter, that he was a lying rascal. They neither proved, nor attempted to prove, any such thing; and, therefore, we may safely conclude, that this testimony of Paul, to the resurrection of Jesus, was true: and it is a testimony, in my opinion, of the greatest weight.

You come, you say, to the last scene, the ascension; upon which, in your opinion, "the reality of the future mission of the disciples was to rest for proof." I do not agree with you in this. The reality of the future mission of the apostles might have been proven, though Jesus Christ had not visibly ascended into heaven. Miracles are the proper proofs of a divine mission: and when Jesus gave the apostles a commission to preach the gospel, he commanded them to stay at Jerusalem, till they "were endued with power from on high." Matthew has omitted the mention of the ascension: and John, you say, has not said a word about it. I think otherwise, John has not given an express account of the ascension, but has certainly said something about it: for he informs us, that Jesus said to Mary, "Touch me not; for I am not yet *ascended* to my father; but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I *ascend* unto my father and your father, and to my God and your God." This is surely saying something about the ascension: and if the fact of the ascension be not related by John or Matthew, it may reasonably be supposed that the omission was made on account of the notoriety of the fact. That the fact was generally known, may be collected justly from the reference which Peter makes of it in the hearing of all the Jews, a very few days after it had happened.—"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses." "Therefore being *by the right hand of God* exalted—Paul bears testimony also to the ascension, when he says, that Jesus was '*received up into glory.*' As to the difference you contend for, between the account of the ascension, as given by Mark and Luke, it does not exist; except in this, that Mark omits the particulars of Jesus going with his disciples to Bethany, and blessing them there, which are mentioned by Luke. But omissions, I must often put you in mind, are not contradictions.

You have now, you say, "gone through the examination of the four books ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; and when it is considered that the whole space of time, from the crucifixion to what is called the ascension, is but a few days, apparently not more than three or four, and that all the circumstances are reported to have happened near the same spot, Jerusalem, it is, I believe, impossible to find, in any story upon record, so many and such glaring absurdities, contradictions, and falsehoods, as are in those books."—What am I to say to this? Am I to say that, in writing this paragraph, you have forfeited your character as an honest man? or admitting your honesty, am I to say that you are grossly ignorant of the subject? Let the reader judge.—John says, that Jesus appeared to his disciples at Jerusalem on the day of his resurrection, and that Thomas was not then with them. The same John says, that after *eight days* he appeared to them again, when Thomas was with them. Now, sir, how *apparently three or four days* can be consistent with *really eight days*, I leave you to make out. But this is not the whole of John's testimony, either with respect to *place* or *time*—for he says—After these things (after the two appearances to the disciples at Jerusalem on the first and on the eighth day after the resurrection) Jesus shewed himself again to his disciples at the sea of *Tiberias*. The sea of Tiberias, I presume you know, was in Galilee: and Galilee, you may know was sixty or seventy miles from Jerusalem, it must have taken the disciples some time, after the eighth day, to travel from Jerusalem to Galilee. What, in your own insulting language to the priests, what have you to answer as to the *same spot, Jerusalem*, as to your apparently *three or four days*?—But this is not all. Luke, in the beginning of the Acts, refers to his gospel, and says—"Christ shewed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs, being seen of the apostles forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:"—instead of *four* you perceive there were *forty* days between the crucifixion and the ascension. I need not, I trust, after this, trouble myself about the falsehoods and contradictions which you impute to the evangelists; your readers cannot but be upon their guard, as to the credit due to your assertions, however

bold and improper. You will suffer me to remark, that the evangelists were plain men; who, convinced of the truth of their narration, and conscious of their own integrity, have related what they knew, with admirable simplicity. They seem to have said to the Jews of their time, and to say to the Jews and unbelievers of all times—We have told you the truth: and if you will not believe us, we have nothing more to say—Had they been impostors, they would have written with more caution and art, have obviated every cavil, and avoided every appearance of contradiction. This they have not done; and this I consider as a proof of their honesty and veracity.

John the baptist had given his testimony to the truth of our Saviour's mission in the most unequivocal terms: he afterwards sent two of his disciples to Jesus, to ask him whether he was really the expected Messiah or not. Matthew relates *both* these circumstances; had the writer of the book of Matthew been an impostor, would he have invalidated John's testimony, by bringing forward his real or apparent doubt? Impossible! Matthew, having proved the resurrection of Jesus, tells us, that the eleven disciples went away into Galilee into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them, and "when they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted." Would an impostor, in the very last place where he mentions the resurrection, and in the conclusion of this book, have suggested such a cavil to unbelievers, as to say—some doubted? Impossible! The evangelist has left us to collect the reason why some doubted:—the disciples saw Jesus, at a distance, on the mountain; and some of them fell down and worshipped him; whilst others doubted whether the person they saw was really Jesus; their doubt, however, could not have lasted long, for in the very next verse we are told, that Jesus came and spake unto them.

Great and laudable pains have been taken by many learned men, to harmonize the several accounts given us by the evangelists of the resurrection. It does not seem to me to be a matter of any great consequence to christianity, whether the accounts can in every minute particular, be harmonized or not; since there is no such discordance in them, as to render the fact of the resurrection doubtful to any impar-

tial mind. If any man in a court of justice, should give positive evidence of a fact, and three others should afterwards be examined, and all of them should confirm the evidence of the first, as to the fact, but should apparently differ from him and from each other, by being more or less particular in their accounts of the circumstances attending the fact; ought we to doubt of the fact, because we could not harmonize the evidence respecting the circumstances relating to it? The omission of any one circumstance (such as that of Mary Magdalene having gone twice to the sepulchre: or that of the angel having, after he had rolled away the stone from the sepulchre, entered into the sepulchre) may render an harmony impossible, without having recourse to supposition to supply the defect. You deists laugh at all such attempts, and call them priestcraft. I think it better then, in arguing with you to admit that there may be (not granting, however, that there is) an irreconcileable difference between the evangelists in some of their accounts respecting the life of Jesus, and his resurrection. Be it so: what then? Does this difference, admitting it to be real, destroy the credibility of the gospel history in any of its essential points? Certainly, in my opinion, not. As I look upon this to be a general answer to most of your deistical objections, I profess my sincerity in saying, that I consider it as a true and sufficient answer; and I leave it to your consideration. I have purposely, in the whole of this discussion, been silent as to the inspiration of the evangelists; well knowing that you would have rejected, with scorn, any thing I could have said on that point: but in, disputing with a deist, I do most solemnly contend, that the Christian religion is true, and worthy of all acceptation, whether the evangelists were inspired or not.

ON THE EVIDENCES OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

Some unbelievers have supposed, that if Jesus had remained on the earth after his resurrection, until the present day, and had continued to work miracles in attestation of the divinity of his mission, the evidences of his resurrection,

and of the truth of Christianity in general, would have been much more satisfactory than they are at present. Let us therefore examine this question in a few words, in order to ascertain, whether, on this hypothesis, objections of greater weight might not have been urged against the resurrection, than can possibly be urged, under existing circumstances, against those evidences, which all Christians believe to be conclusive, in establishing this fundamental doctrine of our holy religion. We will observe then,

1st. That if Jesus had continued to live on the earth, after his resurrection, it would have been necessary in order to the conviction of those sceptics who will only believe on intuitive evidence, that he should have been also present in every part of the earth at the same time, and in every age of the world since the Christian era. For as sceptics deny the validity of testimony in all matters of religion, they would of course, have denied its validity in the present case, and hence, would not have believed Jesus to be the Messiah, without occular demonstration of the fact. But again,

2d. Had Jesus continued to live on the earth, and to give ocular demonstrations of his Messiahship from generation to generation, how long would it have been before it would have been asserted by many, that this man had been always on the earth, and that the tradition of his having once been mortal like other men, was nothing but a superstition gotten up in some age of antiquity, beyond our reach? Hence his extraordinary longevity would have been looked upon as a natural phenomenon, and would consequently have become the subject of a thousand idle speculations, as extravagant as the dream of a poet, and as trifling as the rattle of an infant.

3d. Had Jesus continued, day by day, to work miracles, the people would have concluded that miraculous power was natural to him, and hence they would have affected them no more, than does the rising and setting of the sun, the ebbing and flowing of the sea, or any other every day occurrence. And the same individuals who now say, that the heavens and the earth were from eternity, might in this case, with equal propriety have said, that Jesus Christ and his power of working miracles were from eternity; so that this hypothesis, plausible as it may seem to many, would

have been infinitely less influential in the conviction of mankind of the truth of the gospel, than the plan which God has actually adopted. But the above is not the last difficulty: for if this plan had been adopted, it should be observed,

4th. That we should have been destitute of all that evidence for the truth of the gospel, of which we now avail ourselves from the testimony of its enlightened opposers in the primitive ages of the church; for had Jesus succeeded by irresistible evidence, in convincing all the men of the four centuries immediately succeeding his death and resurrection, that he was a "teacher sent from God," there would have been no Celsus in the second, Porphyry in the third, nor Julian in the fourth centuries, to have given to the latest posterity, their testimony, in relation to the truth of many of the facts, recorded in the New Testament. Nor,

5th. Would there have been a host of martyrs to bleed, not for a predilection towards certain speculative opinions, but for bearing testimony to matters of fact, concerning which it was physically impossible for men who had the use of their senses to be mistaken. Under existing circumstances, therefore, we can produce the testimony of primitive friends and enemies to the truth of the gospel; but on the above hypothesis, we should have been in a great measure destitute of this evidence, and consequently destitute of many means which we now possess, and by which we are convinced, that the gospel can be abundantly vindicated.

I conclude therefore, that the evidences of the Christian religion, like the religion itself, are infinitely superior to every thing ever contrived by human wisdom. The more I examine them, the more firmly am I convinced, that no set of impostors, wise or simple, learned or unlearned, ecclesiastics, politicians, or philosophers. ever originated a scheme, supported as is the Christian, by such an accumulation of evidence.—EDITOR.

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